

Date: June 1, 2011
To: Members, Joint Committee on Finance
From: Tony Evers, State Superintendent
Subject: **Executive Action on 2011-13 Biennial Budget June 2 and 3, 2011**

As I wrote to you last week, for the past 10 years I have worked with many legislators and community leaders to improve the accountability and transparency of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). Recent data show that voucher students score similarly or worse than their Milwaukee Public School (MPS) counterparts. These results are especially troubling given the large disparity of children with special education needs between the two programs. I urged you to restore funding for public schools and work collaboratively to improve the quality of *all* Milwaukee schools before considering any voucher expansion. Thus, as you make your decisions this week regarding MPCP, as well as independent charter schools and open enrollment, I respectfully request that you give consideration to the following:

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION – CHOICE, CHARTER AND OPEN ENROLLMENT

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program -- Payment and Reestimate (Paper #550)

Requested Action: *Adopt Alternative 3.*

This alternative would approve the decision to reduce the MPCP payment per pupil by the same 5.5 percent per pupil adjustment under revenue limits for public school districts. If the state's fiscal picture is truly dire, it is only logical and a matter of fairness to reduce all education sectors by a similar amount. Reducing public school resources, while holding private voucher school payments harmless, is wrong.

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program -- Program Expansion (Paper #551)

Requested Action: *Adopt Alternatives A5, B1 and C3.*

Alternative A5, as similarly reflected in Assembly Amendment 3 to 2011 AB 94, represents a modest and reasonable level of income flexibility for participating MPCP families. For Alternative B1, I have previously stated my support to remove the cap on student participation in the choice program, *as it is currently configured for the city of Milwaukee*. For Alternative C3, the MPCP is funded by a combination of support from the state and the City of Milwaukee. The city's residents are being asked to support two systems with their tax dollars. This places an undue burden on Milwaukee taxpayers. Allowing schools in Milwaukee County to participate in the choice program would have those same taxpayers fund students in private schools outside of their city while providing no avenue to fix this funding flaw. Alternative C3 is consistent with the position the department took on the school expansion contained in 2011 AB 92.

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program -- Required Tests (Paper #552)

Requested Action: *Adopt Alternative 3.*

As I stated in my testimony before the Committee on March 31, I do not understand the desire to eliminate the requirement that choice students take the same state tests that all other kids supported by public dollars take, particularly given the troubling performance of a number of MPCP schools on this year's test. The MPCP will cost nearly \$300 million over the biennium and Milwaukee parents deserve to be able to make informed choices, and need a common test. I cannot believe we want to remove the single measure of accountability for all taxpayer-supported schools.

Independent Charter School Program Expansion (Paper #553)

Requested Action: *Adopt Alternatives A2, B3 and C1.*

Alternative A2 would restore the 2009 Act 28 provision that provides GPR funding for all independent charter school expenditures above the amount spent in 2010-11. This option would reduce statewide aid reductions for all school districts by \$5,820,000 in 2011-12 and \$10,485,000 in 2012-13. In light of the tremendous cuts you have already approved for school districts, this would provide some measure of relief and mitigate additional property tax increases (see attached map showing possible levels of property tax levy increases under the Governor's funding proposal). For Alternative B3, like MPCP, I cannot support statewide expansion of independent charter schools at the same time we are slashing support and resources for our public schools. Again, similar to my position above on MPCP payment levels, Alternative C1 would reduce the per pupil payment amount for independent charter schools by 5.5 percent, the same as the per pupil revenue limit reduction for public school districts.

Virtual Charter School Enrollment Limit (Paper #554)

Requested Action: *Adopt Alternative 1.*

I have previously expressed my support for the elimination of the cap on open enrollment into virtual charter schools.

Open Enrollment Program -- Timelines and Requirements and Alternative (Paper #555)

Requested Action: *Adopt Alternative 2.*

DPI supported Assembly Amendment 3 to 2011 SB 2 which requires a resident district (as well as the pupil's parent and the nonresident district) to agree it would be in the best interests of the pupil to attend the nonresident district under the alternative open enrollment procedure. I acknowledge that there are instances where the best interest of the child would be served by allowing an open enrollment transfer outside of the regular application period. A wide-open exception, however, that doesn't involve the resident district, as in the Governor's proposal, could place the resident district in financial peril at the hands of parties who bear no cost for the decision and have no responsibility to consider the needs of children who continue to be educated in the resident district. This would be an exception in addition to all the other exceptions created in the bill and an extended application period; I believe it should only be used if it is truly needed.

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION – BACK SHEET

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program -- Notice of Administrative Changes (Item #5)

Requested Action: *Modify language to allow DPI to notify only MPCP schools of any proposed changes to the choice program or to the administrative rules governing the MPCP, and delete prohibition on making changes prior to the beginning of the school year the change takes effect.*

The Governor's bill requires DPI to notify each school participating in the choice program ***and the parents and guardians of each pupil attending a choice school*** of any proposed changes to the choice program or to the administrative rules governing the MPCP program prior to the beginning of the school year in which the change takes effect. Locating and contacting each parent or guardian of every MPCP student is a large administrative burden on the department that could be accomplished more efficiently and effectively by the student's choice school. In addition, this provision limits DPI flexibility to make necessary mid-year changes to the choice program, such as those that might impact student health and/or safety or those requested by choice schools.